

Cut the Cake

Sandi Guntrum

In 1968, I started working as a receptionist in the Director's Office in Building 121. I was really young then. In the mornings when I heard Dr. Teller arriving, I would hide in our kitchen area, because I am hard of hearing and, with his heavy accent, I had a hard time understanding him. I thought hiding would be a good idea and less embarrassing. One day, someone told Dr. Teller what I was doing, so he stuck his head around the door and said "Boo!"

Dr. Teller and I eventually became great friends, and I loved to tease him. One year, I made a birthday cake out of a piece of foam—the kind that you stuff pillows with—and heavily frosted it so it would hold up the candles. Dr. Teller had a horrible time trying to cut it, and we kept on giving him bigger and sharper knives to cut it with. He was finally able to cut it, but it took some doing.



Edward Teller with Sandi Guntrum.

Don't Mess With the Cadillac

Sharon Marsh

Marsh found out that sometimes revenge just doesn't pay.

I was working for the Security manager and his deputy during a reorganization, a period of time when our group could only cope by the grace of frequent discussions and solidarity. The deputy had been particularly encouraging and objective through one crisis after another. Although we were grateful for his support, he had developed an annoying habit of appearing out of nowhere and announcing himself with a loud wallop on the file cabinet. The day his sneak attack caused me to spill an entire cup of coffee over papers and my lap, I vowed revenge. But how? The question was settled when he mentioned the gleaming Cadillac Biarritz he had purchased a few months earlier. I devised a plan that would—at least I thought—startle him a little before he caught on. Thereafter, we would shake hands and have a good laugh.

A friend of his procured sheets of letterhead from the Cadillac dealer, and I rushed a letter off to him through the U.S. mail:

Dear Mr. Deputy:

We have received a factory alert and regret to inform you that the standard V8 engine in your 1985 Cadillac Biarritz is subject to recall because of an internal failure that will cause gradual loss of power if not checked. Concern for your safety, therefore, dictates its expeditious attention. You will have the option of replacing the identical engine at no fee with the continuing warranty, or you may wish to upgrade to Cadillac's latest high-performance model, the SSTV8. The newly developed engine boasts a technical advancement in cylinder design that delivers increased gas mileage and significantly more power. The nominal fee for that engine is \$1,000. Whether you decide on the original V8 or the newly introduced SSTV8, the service will take four days during which you will be loaned a demonstrator at no charge.

Please contact our Service Department as soon as possible for an appointment. We apologize for any inconvenience.

Who knew he'd decide to spring for the supersonic engine and call for an appointment?

Old Rad Lab Punch

Old Rad Lab is a legendary libation known to the longest-employed Labbies. A mix of 180-proof alcohol (intended as a cleaning solvent) and a little fruit juice, or in some cases citric acid straight off the shelf, it was for off-site holiday parties—never consumed on site, of course. Don

Correll, while a physicist working on the Tandem Mirror Experiment, recalled the time some Old Rad Lab accidentally spilled on a holiday bundt cake. "The cake absorbed about a quart of the stuff. It was so strong, I couldn't eat it." So this group of experimental physicists did the next logical thing. They tried lighting it on fire.

Mystery Sergeant

John Nuckolls

Nuckolls recalls when he and other colleagues dared to push the limits of a practical joke on Carl Haussmann, founder of the Lab's laser program—and got more than they bargained for.

On a warm, spring Saturday afternoon in the 1970s, a small group was working in my office on the third floor of Building 111. I looked out the window, and saw Associate Director Carl Haussmann drive up and park his spotless white Pontiac convertible directly in front of the red “No Parking” area. Mischief was irresistible.

A few minutes later, when Carl walked into his office on the fifth floor, the phone rang. “Carl, this is Sergeant O’Hare. An officer reported your car is parked illegally. We realize you are busy, but we can’t expect employees to obey the rules if top management doesn’t. I will ask the officer to come up and get your keys and move your car.” George Zimmerman, in my office, was creating the voice of Sergeant O’Hare. There was no officer—we were bluffing. As expected, Carl replied, “No, I’ll move it myself.” We laughed as we watched Carl emerge from 111, get into his white convertible, drive around the traffic oval in front of Building 111 and park on the other side of the street next to Building 123 under some trees. More mischief was irresistible.

Ten minutes later, Carl returned to his office and the phone rang. “Carl, this is Sergeant O’Hare—very sorry to disturb you again, but the grounds crew is scheduled to spray the trees where your convertible is parked with the top down. I will dispatch the officer to get your keys and move the car for you.” There was a long pause. “No! I’ll move the car myself!” and Carl slammed the phone down. Minutes later, our laughter erupted again when Carl crossed the street, raised the top and drove his convertible around behind Building 111. We were tantalized by the possibility of a third act but decided to quit while we were ahead. All swore to secrecy.

During the following week, we heard talk of an unusual Associate Directors’ meeting where Carl asked to speak to Sergeant O’Hare. When Security reported there was no Sergeant O’Hare, Carl assumed Sergeant O’Hare was being protected and resolved to find him sooner or later.

Several years later, when Carl left the Laser Program, there was a going-away ceremony. I was asked to make a few remarks. After recalling Carl’s enormous contributions to founding the Laser Fusion and Isotope Separation Programs, I told the story of Sergeant O’Hare. Afterward, Carl smiled skeptically. “You’ve never kept anything quiet for this long,” he said, and seemed determined to penetrate the continuing cover-up of Sergeant O’Hare.



Carl Haussmann.

Where’d My Office Go?

George Michael

Computation had some very talented people in its graphics group in the 1970s. One of them, Kelly Booth, went on vacation. While he was gone, Mike Archuleta went into his office and took everything out except an old soda machine that Kelly had donated to the crew and a chair. Mike fixed the soda machine to look like a Teletype, so it had some yellow paper coming out of it. When Kelly returned, it took him a week to find all of his stuff and get it back into his office.

Later, when Mike went on vacation, Kelly picked up some paint and some lumber. He went to Mike’s office and boarded it up: basically, he fixed it so that you couldn’t tell there had ever been a door there. It was a beautiful job. As the word spread around the whole Computation Department, there was a constant stream of traffic coming up to look for Mike’s office that wasn’t there anymore. Kelly’s reasoning was that Mike had taken everything out of the office, but he’d left the office. Kelly’s plan was to leave all the things in Mike’s office, but take the office—nice symmetry.

Eventually, the administration found out and decided that it was a security violation and a fire hazard, and ordered things to be restored. So on the Saturday before Mike was due back, Bob Lee, then the group leader, and a couple from the group spent the afternoon restoring things. Mike never got to witness the brilliant spoof!